



selcouth and wondrous, you're my familiar by everybreatheverymove

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Summary: (Prompt: "selcouth" and a mutual "I love you".) This is only a temporary bruise — one he keeps pressing and pressing on until it worsens, hurting him more and more by the hour. But he likes to watch as its color changes, as it gradually fades until his skin is alabaster and freckle-riddled and his own. He can handle a little pain. He's handled a broken heart before.

selcouth and wondrous, you're my familiar

There's something strangely calming about the sweep of her hair against his collarbones, soft curls twirling and knotting together as she moves her head, nuzzling deeper into the crook of his neck with gentle lips pressed to his exposed skin.

His breath stills, Adam's apple bobbing when she rests a hand against the left side of his face and tilts his head back against the cushion, fingertips pushing through the hair at the base of his skull.

"What are you doing?" Mike rasps, and he balls one hand into a fist by his side, nails scratching at the denim thigh of his jeans as it clenches, "El."

She presses a kiss flush against the column of his throat, with a whisper of "something." Her lashes flutter against his neck, and she says, "Do you trust me, Mike?"

"Yeah," he answers, a little too eagerly. Mike frowns, the lump in his throat tightening when the girl slips both of her hands around his neck and pushes up on her knees beside him. "Always." His brows wiggle, watching as she throws one leg over his waist and grasps the collar of his polo shirt with small fists.

She's grimacing, almost as though she's struggling, and Mike impulsively rests a hand on her hip for reassurance. El smiles in return, face softening, and then she leans down to kiss his neck just once, then twice.

"One day," Mike says, out of the blue, and his gaze flickers up to science trophy on the shelf above his bed, above them, unmoved. "Just... you know, if you keep trying, and you don't overdo it, then maybe hopefully they'll come back."

The brunette nods into his chest, and she purses her lips thoughtfully, her mouth moving from the space between his collarbones to his sternum. She rests her head on his chest, ear right over his heartbeat. "Maybe... they won't."

"Well," Mike starts, and he takes a moment to consider his words. It's not outside the realm of possibility that her powers are gone, not just depleted. If they're gone, not used up and ready for recharge, then—"If they're gone, then I guess I'm gonna have to save you from now on." He grins, mostly to himself because she can't see him from her spot on his chest, but Mike feels the smile on her face stretch against his shirt, smoothing out the wrinkles as she grips the collar tighter.

"You always do, Mike."

"Not as much as I should." He closes his eyes, black mass of hair falling back against the cushion when his head drops. He sighs, "Not as much as you've saved me."

There's something oddly familiar about this; this embrace they always seem to find themselves in. It's not driven by hormones, and it's not the after-effect of kissing for far longer than they should. It's close and intimate, but in a way that's normal to them.

(Mike thinks it feels familiar because it reminds him of *home*. Warm summer nights spent in the cabin, and long afternoons in the basement. Sticky heat prickling his skin and her nose sun-kissed after too many hours spent up on the hill with their friends. It reminds him of home, of a time when she was always within walking distance, when she was always *there* and he was always *happy*. It reminds him of a time when they had everything before most of everything fell apart.)

(They wouldn't be who they are if it wasn't for a little bit of tragedy. He'll take pain over the loss of her any day.)

(This is only a temporary bruise — one he keeps pressing and pressing on until it worsens, hurting him more and more by the hour. But he likes to watch as its color changes, as it gradually fades until his skin is once again alabaster and freckly and very much his own. He can handle a little pain. He's handled a broken heart before.)

But while he can handle the ache, and he can deal with the longing, the one thing he's still unable to cope with is the loss of her, of touch. He's grown used to it. The feel of her hair against his face when they hug. The brush of her wrist along his knuckles as they walk together,

forcing unwanted space between them. The softness of her lips pressing against his own, sweetly and gently and short-lived. The feel of her in his arms, collapsed and sobbing and accepted.

"You're lying." El mumbles into the cotton of his shirt, breaking him from his reverie, "but it's okay." She gets it, he knows. The girl slips her fingers from around his neck then, and she presses her palms flat against his chest. "You can make up for it."

"I can?" Mike snorts, unintentionally, and he pushes up on his forearms, forcing his shoulders forward. He waggles a single brow, "how?"

"Say it." She glances up at him for all of maybe two seconds before she's pressing her knees into the mattress and letting go of his shirt, reaching instead for his face. She runs her palms along his jawline until his earlobes are between her index and middle fingers. "Please?"

There's something uniquely singular about this moment, this small fraction of time they're allowed together. No battles or parents. No superpowers or rules. No friends invading their privacy or government conspiracies to distract them from one another. And, while something feels off, as though they're silently waiting for the other shoe to drop, Mike thinks this one peaceful, selcouth moment is the calmest he's felt in months. And he hopes El feels the same.

(It's not home, but she feels like it could be. Here, in his house, the first place she ever truly felt safe. His bed is warm, and there's one single street light outside that's glaring in through the window. El would turn it off if she could, if it meant they'd be swallowed up by the darkness and given the power to pretend this moment is everlasting.)

(It's not home. But *he* is.)

"I miss you, El," he finally says with a smile that slowly turns to a grin, full-fledged and familiar to her, "and I love you." He nods once, "so much."

"Me too." Her nose crinkles, and she chews the inside of her bottom lip for a second, "I love you, too."

(It's not home. But it doesn't matter because it's enough for now.)